

The Divine Conspiracy | Dr. Dallas Willard

Reviewed by Max Frazier in the June 2003 Philogian

The Divine Conspiracy is one of those books Francis Bacon would describe as needing to be chewed and digested. Its author is Dr. Dallas Willard who is a professor at the University of Southern California. The essence of the book is a fascinating study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and its relevancy for today's world. Dr. Willard asks the question whether a knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ should have any impact upon the way that we live. He writes:

The most telling thing about the contemporary Christian is that he or she has no compelling sense that understanding of and conformity with the clear teachings of Christ is of any vital important to their life, and certainly not that it is in any way essential.... Such obedience is regarded as just out of the question or impossible.

He goes on to relate that for most Christians, a relationship with Jesus Christ has meaning only as it relates to the future – the “I have a ticket to heaven now” mentality. But Jesus came, not only to give us a future hope and a future home – *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am* (John 14:3) – but to enable us to live an abundant and successful life now – *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (John 10:10). Dr. Willard describes this as living with the kingdom among us now. He uses the Sermon on the Mount as God's blueprint for successful living now, or as he says, living my life the way that Jesus would if he were me.

I found one of the most helpful chapters was his discussion of that part of the Sermon we know as the Lord's Prayer. He removed much of the stiffness and formality from that prayer – which might come from its liturgical use in our worship services – and made it more relational. I think its essence can best be captured by sharing his rendering of this prayer:

*Dear Father always near us,
may your name be treasured and loved,
may your rule be completed in us –
may your will be done here on earth in just the way it is done in heaven.*

*Give us today the things we need today,
and forgive us our sins and impositions on you as we are forgiving all who in any way offend us.*

*Please don't put us through trials, but deliver us from everything bad,
because you are the one in charge, and you have all the power, and the glory too is all yours – forever –
which is just the way we want it!*

He closes this chapter by writing: *“Just the way we want it” is not a bad paraphrase for “amen.” What is needed at the end of this great prayer is a ringing affirmation of the goodness of God and God's world. If your nerves can take it you might (occasionally?) try “Whoopee!” I imagine God himself will not mind.*

This is not a book to be hurried through. In fact, I plan to reread it again this summer so that I might savor its message more reflectively. I want to more fully understand what it means to be a member of God's kingdom now.

I will allow Dr. Willard to quote himself one final time. *The sensed irrelevance of what God is doing to what makes up our lives is the foundational flaw in the existence of multitudes of professing Christians today. ... It is left unexplained how it is possible that one can rely on Christ for the next life without doing so for this one, trust him for one's eternal destiny without trusting him for "the things that relate to Christian life." Is this really possible? Surely it is not! Not within one life.*

I heartily recommend this book if you wish to have your heart and mind challenged in a life-changing way. I would welcome your comments after you have read it. Have a wonderful summer...and enjoy a good book!